DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 216 600 HE 015 035

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TITLE Faculty Opinions of Students' Basic Skills: A Survey Report from The Languages of the Disciplines Project.
INSTITUTION Pittsburgh Univ., Pa. School of Education.
SPONS AGENCY Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (ED), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE [82]
NOTE 32p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Basic Skills; College Credits; College Faculty; *College Preparation; Competence; Faculty Development; Higher Education; Institutional Research; Instructional Materials; Language Skills; Remedial Programs; *Study Skills; *Teacher Attitudes; *Undergraduate Students
IDENTIFIERS *University of Pittsburgh PA

ABSTRACT

Opinions of 162 University of Pittsburgh faculty concerning the basic academic skill levels of undergraduates now attending the university were surveyed in 1981. A majority of the respondents felt that the 1980 undergraduates possess basic skills levels that are lower than the comparable cohort of 1970. They felt the greatest losses were in writing ability, spelling, and reading. The predominant opinion for a decline in the basic skills levels of entering students was that their high school preparation in the basic skills was inadequate. Nearly one-third of the respondents felt that there was a deemphasis on basic skills mastery in modern society. Most of the respondents stated that developmental courses and services should be offered by institutions of higher education, and about 58 percent favored not granting credits toward graduation for basic skills coursework, while about 42 percent favored the granting of credit to some degree. Just under half of the respondents would consider assigning a text that integrates traditional course content with learning aids to benefit students with deficient skills, while the majority favored assigning a study skills textbook that teaches undergraduates the specific reading, writing, and study skills required for the successful mastery of the subject matter in a specific discipline. If the university were to offer an inservice education program to help faculty in working effectively with students who have inadequate skills, about 51 percent of the respondents would be interested, and about 47 percent would not. (SW)

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FACULTY OPINIONS OF STUDENTS' BASIC SKILLS

A Survey Report from

The Languages of the Disciplines Project

In March 1981 a questionnaire was mailed to 475 faculty members of the University of Pittsburgh, asking their opinions of the basic academic skill levels of undergraduates now attending the University. The members of the sample were selected by drawing every fifth name on a computer printout of faculty members. If a person did not serve in a school which taught undergraduates, the name was eliminated from the process. Although faculty members teaching undergraduates were targeted as the primary recipients of the questionnaires, changes in teaching positions on the part of some faculty members resulted in responses from some graduate level instructors also.

Of the 475 questionnaires, 184 were returned, and 162 of these were used in our data analysis. Twenty-four questionnaires were returned by faculty members who did not teach undergraduates. They noted this and completed no other part of the survey. For any given question there was a range of usable responses from 134 to 162. This report is a summary of the responses to the questions. Each question is listed and followed by a narrative summary and tables when appropriate.

Faculty ranks and the schools of the respondents were cross-tabulated with the responses to each question. The number and percentage of questionnaires returned by faculty members from each school are reported in Table I and from each faculty rank in Table II. Much of the data as presently categorized are unsuitable for chi-square analysis, and the task of performing all of the possible analyses was too great, considering the limited scope of this report.

Because of the aforementioned difficulty in analyzing the data statistically, the cross-tabulations have been descriptively analyzed for the purposes of this

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TABLE I

QUESTIONNAIRES RETURNED FROM

SCHOOLS WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY

School	Number Returned	Percent of Total Returns
Schools that Provide Undergraduate and Graduate Professional Training		
Arts and Sciences	98	60.4
Education	16	9.9
Engineering	10	6.2
Nursing	9	5.6
Social Work	3	1.9
Business	3	1.9
Library and Information Science	3	1.9
Health Related Professions	3	1.9
Pharmacy	1	0.6
Group Subtotal	146	90.3
Schools that Provide Graduate Professional Training Only		
Law	3	1.9
Public and International Affairs	2	1.2
Medicine	2	1.2
Public Health	2	1.2
Dental Medicine	2	1.2
Group Subtotal	11	6.7
Miscellaneous Returns		
General Studies	1	0.6
Library	2	1.2
Unknown	2	1.2
Subtotal	5	3.0
TOTAL	162	100.0

report. Observable trends by faculty rank or by school are mentioned in the description of the responses to a given question. Since there were very few respondents from several schools within the University, all schools were grouped together for the purposes of the analysis shown in Table II.

TABLE II

RETURNED QUESTIONNAIRES AS A FUNCTION

OF FACULTY RANKING

Rank	Number Returned	Percent of Total Returns
Professor	48	29.6%
Associate Professor	56	34.6
Assistant Professor	42	25.9
Instructor	8	4.9
Lecturer	5	3.1
Other	3	1.9
TOTAL	162	100.0

Considering the fact that this questionnaire was sent out within the University of Pittsburgh only, it is not unexpected that most of the respondents stated that they are currently teaching at a research university (84.4%). What is surprising is that a minority of respondents selected other options. A number noted that they were teaching at either a comprehensive university (non-doctorate granting) (05.8%) or a liberal arts college (05.8%).

The researchers were also interested in whether the respondents had served in other types of educational settings. Most of the faculty noted that they have taught

at a research university (88.9%); yet, a sizeable number have also taught in other types of institutions. Nearly a quarter of the respondents (23.5%) have taught at a liberal arts college and 16.7% of the faculty served at a comprehensive university or college. In addition, a minority of the respondents taught at either the secondary school level (16.7%) or in an elementary school (05.6%). Thus, it appears that the vast majority of the respondents to this survey based their opinions on experiences at the University level.

Most faculty (52.8%), full professors particularly, had been teaching at the University for ten years or longer. This means that the majority of respondents have been able to observe students within the institution for the time period covered by this questionnaire. Approximately 11% of the respondents have been at Pitt between seven and ten years. For the most part, this group was comprised of associate professors. Over a third of the respondents have been teaching at Pitt less than seven years (34.6%). As would be expected, instructors and assistant professors tended to have lesser amounts of service at the institution.

A majority of the faculty (70%) have been teaching at institutions of higher education for ten years or longer. Consequently, an even larger majority of the respondents have been able to observe the skills levels of undergraduate students for the ten-year time period covered by this questionnaire. Only 07.5% of the respondents have been teaching at the college level for less than four years. A slightly larger number of respondents have been serving four to six years (11.3%) or between seven years and nine years (10.6%).

Three quarters of the respondents have taught either upper division (79.6%) or lower division (74.7%) college courses during the ten years preceding the date of the survey. In addition, 74.7% of the respondents have taught graduate level courses. A minority of the respondents had teaching experiences with nontraditional college

offerings, such as community education courses (14.2%), adult basic education services (07.4%) or college readiness institutes (03.1%).

In these pages, each of the questionnaire items is listed and is followed by a presentation of the responses provided by the faculty members participating in the survey. Whenever necessary, tables are provided for clarity. In addition, selected comments and suggestions from respondents are provided for several items.

Question 1. Does the average college student of 1980/81 have the same competencies in the basic skills as his counterpart of 1970?

A majority of the respondents were of the opinion that the undergraduate students of 1980 possess basic skills levels that are lower than the comparable cohort of 1970. As the data in Table III details, the largest numbers of responses indicate that students' skill levels have fallen in five of the seven categories. The greatest number of responses in this category was noted for a decrease in writing ability (62.6%) followed respectively by spelling (55.2%), reading (51%), study habits, speech and arithmetic. It is noted that 40% of the respondents felt that arithmetic skills were not relevant to their teaching duties; however, a majority of those using arithmetic in their classes noted a decline in basic skills levels. For each skill area, a respectable percentage of respondents believed that the skills levels remained stable over the ten years. In fact, in one case (speech) nearly 55% favored this response. Few faculty members indicated that the skills levels increased between 1970 and 1980. Several faculty members, however, noted that they were not teaching in the 1970's and thus could not answer the question. One faculty member did not respond to the question because the assessment of students in that department is via machine graded exams.

TABLE III

FACULTY OPINIONS ON CHANGES IN STUDENT BASIC SKILLS LEVELS BETWEEN 1970 AND 1980

Skills Area	Number of Responses	Percentage of Faculty Reporting that the Basic Skills Levels of Current Undergraduates are			
		Higher than the skills levels of their predecessors	About the same as the skills levels of their predecessors	Lower than the skills levels of their predecessors	Not relevant to my teaching duties
Reading	147	3.4%	40.8%	51.0%	4.8%
Writing	147	3.4	27.9	62.6	6.1
Speech	146	4.8	54.8	34.2	6.2
Spelling	145	3.5	34.5	55.2	6.9
Arithmetic	144	3.5	26.4	29.2	41.0
Study Habits	146	8.2	37.7	48.6	5.5
Average Basic Skills	148	2.7	33.1	60.1	4.1

Faculty members from schools providing some sort of professional training tended to indicate that skills levels held constant rather than dropped. It is possible that these faculty members are working with only the most capable students because of selectivity operating in relation to competition for professional school admission.

Question 2. Which of the following helped you to form your current opinions about the basic skills levels of undergraduate students? Check all the responses that apply.

The majority (77.6%) of the faculty members responding to this item formed their current opinions about the basic skills levels of undergraduate students on the basis of their personal assessments of students' class work and their informal interaction with the students. Another major influence (59.2%) of the instructors' opinions was their discussions with other professionals from within the same discipline. In fact, a clear majority of the responses are factors influenced by individual interaction between faculty members and their students or between faculty members and their colleagues. A few said they were influenced by press (19.8%) or by TV commercials (11.1%). Additional responses to this item are detailed in Table IV.

Since each respondent was permitted to select all of the influential options, the data in Table IV is reported in two ways: (1) the percentages of faculty members choosing a particular response out of the total number of respondents (n=162) to item number two and (2) the percentage of the faculty members choosing a particular option out of the total number of faculty responses (n=441) to the ten options in item two. This procedure will be followed with similar items throughout the body of this report.

Question 3. In your opinion what are the three major reasons for the decline in the basic skills levels of entering students? Please put a check by the three most important factors pertaining to the decline.

The predominant opinion offered for a decline in the basic skills levels of entering students was that their high school preparation in the basic skills was inadequate (53.1%). Nearly one-third of the respondents felt that there was a

TABLE IV

FACTORS INFLUENCING FACULTY OPINIONS ON BASIC SKILLS LEVELS

Factors Influencing Opinions	Number of Responses	Percentages of Faculty Selecting this Response (n = 162)	Percentage of the Total Number of Responses (n = 441)
Personal assessment of your current students based on class assignments and informal interaction	126	77.6%	28.6%
Discussions with professionals in your discipline	96	59.2	21.7
Discussions with professionals outside your discipline	59	36.4	13.4
Personal experience with a public school system	35	21.6	07.9
Personal reading in the popular press	32	19.8	07.3
Professional reading in journals, monographs, books, etc.	28	17.3	06.3
Discussions with people not associated with higher education	21	12.9	04.8
Viewing reports on television	18	11.1	04.1
Papers presented at professional conferences	14	08.6	03.2
Other	12	07.4	02.7
			100.0

deemphasis of basic skills mastery by modern society.

Table V demonstrates that three of the six most frequently cited reasons ultimately become functions of or factors in pre-college education. As might be expected, a number of the respondents believe that an overindulgence in television viewing by today's young people adversely affects their performance in the basic skills (20.4%). This reason may be linked to another of the six most commonly cited factors, the desire by today's students for immediate self-gratification (17.3%).

Respondents from professional training areas tended to cite various other reasons in greater proportions than the modal response level for each possible answer. For example, respondents from the School of Education tended to blame lack of parent/societal support for education more than others. Several of the respondents who provided written responses noted that students now have lower levels of self-discipline and a less developed sense of responsibility than did their predecessors.

Question 4. Should institutions of higher education provide remedial development education for students lacking the adequate levels of basic skills needed to succeed in college?

Most of the respondents stated that developmental courses and services should be offered by institutions of higher education. This group can be divided into three subgroups based on the specific nature of their responses. A plurality of the respondents (37.1%) felt that all institutions should offer developmental courses or services to students requiring such assistance. A second group (17.5%) took a somewhat narrower stance; these respondents believe that such services should be offered only to nontraditional students enrolled through special admissions programs. Another affirmative response group (19.6%) favored offering the services at community colleges. In total, 74.2% of the respondents favored offering the services as opposed to 16.1% who believed that students without the prerequisite skills should be

TABLE V

FACULTY OPINIONS ON THE MAJOR REASONS FOR THE BASIC SKILLS DECLINE

Reasons for Skills Decline	Number of Responses	Percentages of Faculty Selecting this Response (n = 162)	Percentage of the Total Number of Responses (n = 393)
Inadequate student preparation in the basic skills by the schools.	86	53.1%	21.9%
De-emphasis on basic skills mastery by modern society	48	29.6	12.2
Negative effect of overindulgence in television viewing	33	20.4	08.4
Teachers lacking personal competence in the basic skills	32	19.8	08.1
Poor professional training of elementary and secondary school teachers	29	17.9	07.4
Desire by today's students for immediate self-gratification	28	17.3	07.1
Grade inflation at high school level	25	15.4	06.4
Greater number of nontraditional students entering higher education	24	14.8	06.1
Lack of parental/societal support for education	21	13.0	05.3
Lack of provision of content field preparation in high school curriculum	16	09.9	04.1
Depersonalization of the educational system	14	08.8	03.6
Deterioration of the family	10	06.2	02.5
Societal upheavals during the 1960's and 1970's	5	03.1	01.3
Excess Federal/State involvement in education	3	01.9	00.8
Other	19	11.8	04.8
			100.0

excluded from college. Another 9.7% of the respondents to this item offered more specific suggestions; however, for the most part these were affirmative responses. A sample of these responses is given below:

> "No, a student who does not master the basic skills in high school is not motivated to do so, either then or in college."
>
> "Should set up a prep school. Entering students should be given tests to determine if they have the basic skills to enter the University or if they must first attend the prep school."
>
> "All institutions should offer such courses to the student body at large and should require such courses of students who need them."
>
> "Should require remedial courses and make entry into regular program contingent on mastery of basic skills."
>
> "Pitt should be more selective in admissions, but continue to offer skills training."

Question 5. How many course credits of basic skills development course work should a student be permitted to count towards a degree objective?

The majority sentiment expressed by the respondents is for not granting credits toward graduation for basic skills course work. Of the 149 valid responses to the item, 58.4% of the respondents took this stand. On the other hand, 41.6% of the respondents favored the granting of credit to some degree. As Table VI demonstrates, the respondents who favor the granting of credit were not in agreement as to the number of credits which should be permitted to count towards a college degree. The largest minority opinion favored granting credits based upon the individual needs of each student.

TABLE VI

FACULTY OPINIONS ON GRANTING CREDIT FOR DEVELOPMENTAL COURSES

Credit Option	Number of Responses (n=149)	Percentages of Respondents
No credits	87	58.3%
1-3 credits	13	08.7
4-6 credits	15	10.1
7-9 credits	5	03.4
10-12 credits	5	03.4
13-15 credits	2	01.3
Based on student need	21	14.1
As many credits as desired	1	00.7
		100.0

Question 6. When you encounter a student who is deficient in the basic skills, what is your usual practice? Check each response that applies.

When most of the respondents (62.3%) encounter a student who is deficient in the basic skills, they refer him or her to a learning assistance program such as the Writing Workshop or the Learning Skills Center. Another common response to this situation is to recommend that the student enroll in basic skills courses such as those offered in writing by the English department or in reading by the Language Communications program (47.5%). Yet, it is noted that only a minority (13.6%) of the respondents follow up their recommendations by contacting the student's advisor.

Nearly a quarter of the respondents stated that they tutor students to some extent. The extent of these tutoring activities is dependent upon the subject matter, the time requirements and the severity of the problem. A lesser number refer the

student to a graduate student for assistance or assist the pupil in finding a private tutor.

"Sink-or-swim" attitudes were also reported. Roughly 20 percent of the respondents favored encouraging the student to attain those levels of competency that are commensurate with his untutored ability. They would permit the student to discover that he or she may not be able to succeed with study at the level of the particular course. Nearly as many respondents noted that they would advise the pupil to drop out of a course if it were truly beyond the student's ability.

Approximately 14 percent of the 162 respondents noted that they overlook the student's basic skills deficiency as long as the subject matter is mastered. One respondent commented that this action would be taken in regard to some courses but not for other courses that he teaches. Table VII summarizes the responses to this item.

Question 7. A. Have you adopted any of the following actions in response to students' decline in basic skills?

B. Using the preceding list of actions, please note each of them which you would recommend to a new colleague who is encountering the problem for the first time.

The responses to both sections of this question are being considered together. The faculty action that appears to be the most widely practiced to offset skills deficiencies is the expansion of discussion and questioning activities in their introductory classes (42%). Faculty respondents (35.8%) would also recommend this strategy to a new colleague in their respective departments. Sizeable groups of respondents have adopted other practices: (1) 25.9% have increased the utilization of audio-visual materials, (2) 22.8% have lowered the level of the course requirements, (3) 21.6% have assigned major class texts that are written at simplified readability levels, and (4) 21.6% have assigned supplementary class materials that explain the course content in simpler terms. Thus in fact, five of the six most frequently

TABLE VII

FACULTY ACTIONS UPON ENCOUNTERING STUDENTS WITH BASIC SKILLS PROBLEMS

Practices	Number of Responses	Percentages of Faculty Selecting this Response (n=162)	Percentage of the Total Number of Responses (n=360)
Refer the student to a learning assistance program (e.g. Student Learning Center, Writing Workshop, Peer Tutoring Program)	101	62.3%	28.2%
Recommend that the student enroll in a basic skills course	77	47.5	21.4
Actively tutor the student	39	24.1	10.8
Encourage the student to do what he can and let him discover that he cannot succeed in study at this level	35	21.6	09.7
Advise the student to drop the course	34	21.0	09.4
Overlook the student's basic skill deficiency as long as he seems to understand the subject matter in the course	27	16.7	07.5
Contact the student's advisor or counselor	22	13.6	06.1
Refer the student to a graduate student for assistance	13	08.0	03.6
Find the student a private tutor	12	07.5	03.3
			100.0

noted current activities are traditional instructional practices.

Activities which are carried out less frequently, those that are more innovative, include: simulation/gaming techniques (11.7%), case study techniques (09.3%), field-based experiences and internships (08%), computer-assisted instruction (03.7%) and the Personalized System of Instruction (03.7%). Although such methods are limited to classes of a specific nature, these responses may point toward possible topics for faculty development activities.

As Table VIII demonstrates, the faculty members would not always recommend that junior faculty adopt their own current teaching practices. As an example, 22.8% of the respondents stated that they lowered the level of the course requirements to meet the achievement levels of undergraduate students, yet only 11.7% would recommend this practice to a colleague. Another response involving lowered academic demands, the reduction in written assignments, also is practiced (21%) more than recommended (10.5%). With regard to the latter, several people stated that they are now assigning a greater amount of class work which demands writing with provisions for rewriting. Of course, several of these mentioned a need for assistance in evaluation of such work.

On the other hand, there are several practices which are recommended more often than they are used. Examples of these responses include: (1) assigning supplementary class materials that explain the class material in simpler terms, (2) developing small group study sessions, (3) arranging for the library or the student learning center to provide course-related academic support services. Since these activities are currently supported by a number of faculty members it might be inferred that others are noticing the results and considering the incorporation of such strategies into their own classes. Therefore, it might be of value for a committee of faculty members, faculty development personnel, and basic skills coordinators to jointly develop a set of guidelines for developing and using such

TABLE VIII

FACULTY TEACHING: PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Instructional Activities	Adopted Practices		Practices Recommended for New Faculty	
	Percentages of Faculty Selecting this Response (n=162)	Percentage of the Total Number of Responses (n=419)	Percentages of Faculty Selecting this Response (n=162)	Percentage of the total Number of Responses (n=419)
Expanded the role of discussion and questioning in class	42.0%	16.2%	35.8%	14.2%
Increased utilization of audio-visual materials	25.9	10.0	25.9	10.2
Lowered the level of course requirements to meet the achievement levels of entering undergraduate students	22.8	08.8	11.7	04.6
Assigned supplementary class materials that explain the course content in simpler terms	21.6	08.4	28.4	11.2
Assigned major class texts which are written at simplified readability levels	21.6	08.4	19.8	07.8
Reduced written assignments depending upon students basic skills competencies (i.e., term papers, essay tests, lengthy reading assignments)	21.0	08.1	10.5	04.2
Maintained usual instructional techniques while giving a larger proportion of low grades	17.3	06.7	14.8	05.9
Developed small group study sessions	16.0	06.2	22.8	09.0

Arranged for the campus media center, the library or the student learning center to provide course-related academic support services	13.6	05.3	19.1	07.6
Employed simulation/gaming techniques in teaching	11.7	04.5	10.5	04.1
Used case study teaching techniques	09.3	03.6	09.3	03.7
Adopted a model of competency-based education	08.6	03.3	11.1	04.4
Utilized field experiences and internships to teach concepts through first-hand experience	08.0	03.1	06.8	02.7
Utilized computer-assisted instruction	03.7	01.4	07.4	02.9
Adopted a Personalized System of Instruction (P.S.I.) or a contract learning system	03.7	01.4	07.4	02.9
Other	11.7	04.5	11.7	04.6
		100.0		100.0

supportive systems.

Several respondents described other actions that they utilize in meeting the problems the students face. One respondent noted that incomplete grades can be used to allow students extra time to master the material. Another supplies students with lists of important terms and concepts. And, as might be expected, a number simply grade on the curve, failing some students in each class.

Question 8. Would you use in your introductory courses a text that integrated traditional course content with learning aids that benefit undergraduates with deficient basic skills? Please check the appropriate responses.

Just under half of the respondents (44.5%) would consider assigning a text which integrates traditional course content with learning aids to benefit students with deficient skills. An additional 14.6% would definitely assign such a text. Only a small minority of respondents (6.6%) stated that they currently assign such a text. An examination of these text titles shows that they span the traditional college curriculum. The remaining 33.6% of the respondents would not assign a specialized text of this nature.

Question 9. Would you assign for your introductory course an extra study skills textbook that teaches undergraduates the specific reading, writing and study skills required for successful mastery of the subject matter of your discipline? Please check the appropriate boxes.

The majority of the respondents favored assigning a study skills textbook that teaches undergraduates the specific reading, writing and study skills required for the successful mastery of the subject matter in a specific discipline. As Table IX indicates, the degree to which this recommendation is espoused varies on two counts:

(1) whether a text is required or optional, and (2) whether the respondent chose an affirmative or negative response.

Only five of the respondents currently assign such a text to all their students and six of the respondents list one as an optional text. A second affirmative option allowed respondents to note that they would assign such a text if it were well-written. Twelve (21.8%) of them would require that all of the students in the class buy such a text, while thirty-two faculty members (30.8%) would list the book as an optional text.

Another group of the respondents felt that only students with basic skills deficiencies would benefit from working with a discipline-specific study skills text. Thirteen (23.6%) faculty members would assign a text to these students while a larger number (47.1%) would recommend such material as an optional text or workbook.

Only a minority of the total number of respondents would not consider assigning or recommending a discipline-specific study skills text to any students in their introductory courses. Twenty-five faculty members (45.5%) noted that they would not assign this type of text regularly, and seventeen (16.3%) would not recommend one even as an optional text.

These figures imply that there is a "market", at least at Pitt, for discipline-specific study skills materials that assist students in mastering the content of introductory courses. It might be of value for the various departments around campus that offer introductory course work to develop either reference lists of currently available materials or discipline-specific study skills guides for the undergraduates. Such undertakings might be funded by faculty development grants.

TABLE IX

FACULTY WILLINGNESS TO ASSIGN
A DISCIPLINE SPECIFIC STUDY SKILLS TEXT

Responses	Percentages of Respondents Who Would Assign a Required Text (n = 55)	Percentages of Respondents Who Would Assign an Optional Text (n = 104)
1. Yes, I currently assign such a text to my introductory course.	09.1% (5)	05.8% (6)
2. Yes, if the text was well written I would assign it to my introductory courses.	21.8 (12)	30.8 (32)
3. No, but I would recommend such a text to students with low levels of basic skills.	23.6 (13)	47.1 (49)
4. No. I wouldn't assign such a text to my introductory classes.	45.5 (25)	16.3 (17)

Question 10. When an institution of higher education accepts tuition from a newly admitted undergraduate student, does that institution:

A) incur the moral obligation to provide educational experience at that student's achievement levels?

B) enter into a contractual agreement by which the institution should provide the student with educational experiences at the student's achievement levels?

C) promise the student an opportunity to learn as much as he/she can through interaction with faculty members and students as well as through the utilization of additional campus resources such as academic support services, library facilities, etc.

D) other

Unequivocally (response level of 76.1%) it was believed that a student is promised an opportunity to learn as much as he/she can through interaction with faculty members and students as well as through the utilization of additional campus resources such as academic support services, library facilities, etc. This opinion is opposed to the institution having either a moral (06%) or contractual (06.7%) obligation to provide the students with educational experiences at their achievement levels. Faculty believe that students themselves are primarily responsible for succeeding in their own education. A number of faculty members (11.2%) provided specific comments on this item. A list of their responses includes the following opinions:

The institution incurs an obligation:

"to provide a good analysis of entrant's probability of learning in this environment,"

"to provide alternative career/vocational choices and to counsel those who do not progress in academia,"

"to promise the students an opportunity to learn and help them in overcoming skills problems, but the student must provide motivation and effort,"

"to provide an opportunity to learn at accepted University levels".

Questions 11 through 17.

Questions eleven through seventeen requested that the members of the sample provide information about their backgrounds as instructors. Of interest to the investigators were:

1) the types of institutions where respondents have served,
2) the number of years they have been teaching,
3) the class levels they have taught,
4) the current academic ranks of the respondents, and
5) the departments and schools represented by the respondents.

The data from each of seven questions were presented in the description of the respondents which preceded the report of the data.

Question 18a. If your college/university were to institute an inservice program in which faculty members could share effective techniques for teaching undergraduates who are deficient in basic skills, would you be willing to participate?

Of the faculty members responding to the questionnaires, 51.4% would be willing to participate, and 47.3% would prefer not to participate in such a faculty development program. Assistant professors and instructors were more resistant to this type of program than the other academic rankings. This situation may be explained in part by the time pressures put on nontenured faculty to publish and conduct research.

Question 18b. Please check the three types of programs that would be of the greatest interest to you.

Although no single program generated an overwhelming amount of interest, those programs generating the greatest interest were: formal mini-courses (32.9%), a symposium (22.8%), cooperative departmental curriculum development activities (22.8%), and informal workshops (21.6%). A lesser number of faculty expressed an interest in attending conferences on the topic (18%) or an interest in receiving individual assistance in developing teaching techniques and services (17.4%). It was not surprising to find that only a limited number of respondents (10.6%) favored new faculty orientation sessions since these have a rather narrow audience. Those types of programs which generate the least interest include: formal courses offered for advanced graduate credit (9.9%), individual reading of topical materials distributed by consultants (9.9%), opportunities to conduct research on instructional methods and devices (9.9%), and intervisitation activities with other programs (7.5%).

TABLE X

FACULTY PREFERENCES FOR
DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS ABOUT BASIC SKILLS INSTRUCTION

Programs	Number of Responses	Percentages of Faculty Selecting this Response (n=161)	Percentage of the Total Number of Responses (n=302)
Formal mini-courses utilizing lectures, discussions, demonstrations, etc.	53	32.9%	17.6%
A symposium including professors and guest speakers	37	22.8	12.2
Cooperative departmental curriculum development activities	37	22.8	12.2
Informal workshops utilizing buzz sessions, brainstorming, role playing, etc.	35	21.6	11.6
Institutional support to attend conferences pertaining to the topic	29	18.0	09.6
Individual consultation services to help in developing instructional techniques and devices	28	17.4	09.3
New faculty orientation sessions	17	10.6	05.6
Opportunities to conduct research on instructional methods and devices	16	09.9	05.3
Formal courses offered for advanced graduate credit	16	09.9	05.3
Individual reading of topical materials distributed by a consultant	16	09.9	05.3
Intervisitation activities with other programs or institutions	12	07.5	04.0
Other	6	03.7	02.0
			100.0

At the close of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to provide additional comments about either the survey or the basic skills levels of undergraduates. Thirty-two respondents took the opportunity to list their comments. As would be expected from the faculty of a large institution, a full range of comments, suggestions and observations were put forth. While it is not possible to list all of them, some of the more thought-provoking comments are listed:

1. "If we select students who have selected skills, then we need faculty who can effectively cope with such students. We need a better match of faculty and students."

2. "Research universities are badly weakened by students that should not be there. The remedy as in California is to have special schools at a lower level for them."

3. "Since I teach in a graduate school, I cannot really respond to your questionnaire. At the graduate level, things have not changed in 15 years— English comp, spelling and math are constant problems."

4. "Perhaps university faculty should effectively communicate with high school (and jr./community college) teachers as to what the real problems are and what is expected at the university level."

5. "The arts have been utilized as hobby and therapy in our educational institutions and not as a serious-sense (vision) that can be educated. To learn anything, educated vision is essential."

6. "This questionnaire assumes that I find students more deficient in basic skills now than in 1970 (I do not). It therefore begs the question it purports to ask."

7. "Most essay exams are appalling! Poor grammar, poor penmanship, poor spelling."

8. "I strongly oppose the trend toward "simplifying" textbooks. Students need to be challenged, not patronized."

9. "Most important questions are not really addressed here. 1) Motivation - how do we make the student want to acquire basic skills and 2) Society's standards - how can we fight a society that accepts illiteracy?"

10. "Your survey completely omitted the consideration of basic skills problems which foreign students bring to classes with their American classmates."

11. "The biggest problem which I encounter is that students in high schools aren't taught to think. The students always want a specific example which to emulate."

12. "The good teacher is good with any group of students - the amateurs, light-weights, and pompous professorial types are the real failures in education."

13. "This survey addresses skills levels of entering undergraduates. The same lack of skills is very evident with entering graduate students from many colleges here and elsewhere."

14. "Many of my students have told me that I am their first university instructor who corrected/edited their written work. At first I doubted it. As years passed, I now believe it. I believe college teachers who assign written and/or oral work should also teach basic skills by correcting and editing students' work."

Such comments and suggestions point toward numerous possibilities for research, curriculum development, interdisciplinary cooperation and assistance, and outreach activities. In the long run this survey has raised as many questions as it has provided answers. The preceding comments serve as evidence.

Summary: In March of 1981 a questionnaire on the basic academic skill levels of undergraduate students was mailed to 475 faculty members who teach undergraduate courses at the University of Pittsburgh. Of the 184 returned, 162 were complete enough to be tabulated and analyzed. More than half of the respondents felt that during the last ten years student competencies in skills had decreased, the greatest losses being in writing ability, spelling, and reading. They said their opinions were based on their personal observations (77.6%) as well as on discussions with other professionals (59.2%).

Approximately 53% of these faculty members blamed inadequate skills development on poor high school preparation, while nearly a third felt it was a reflection of change in the values of American society.

Approximately 74% of faculty members felt that colleges and universities should offer some type of corrective service to improve student skills, while only about 16% felt that students who did not have prerequisite skills should be excluded from higher education. More than a third of the "positive" respondents felt that all colleges and universities should offer corrective services, and smaller numbers felt such services should be provided only in special admission programs or through community colleges. Approximately 42% favored the granting of credits for corrective courses, while 58% were opposed.

When these professors encounter students who have skills problems, about 62% refer them to services such as the Writing Workshop or the Learning Skills Center, and about 47% refer them to courses like those in writing offered by the English Department and/or courses in reading offered by the Language Communications Program. Usually they do not have an opportunity to follow up on how well the students succeed in these situations.

About one-fourth of the faculty members mentioned that they do some individual tutoring of students. In contrast, about one-fifth prefer simply to let a student discover that he is attempting to perform beyond his ability.

More than forty percent of respondents have increased the amount of discussion and questioning with today's students, and a fourth have increased their use of audio-visual devices and other interesting techniques. About one-fifth of the faculty have assigned textbooks or supplementary materials that are written more simply than previously, while 22.8% say that they have had to lower the level of the requirements for their courses.

More than half of the respondents are interested in finding textbooks that incorporate more learning aids with traditional course content, and the majority favor using a study skills text to teach specific reading, writing, and study skills required for mastery of the content of their discipline. Five use such materials now.

Although, as noted above, faculty members are willing to help students overcome their skills problems, only about 7 percent feel that the university has a moral or contractual obligation to guarantee success for every student. The majority (76.1%) believe that the student, being primarily responsible for his own success, is promised an opportunity to learn by utilizing the faculty and all other resources at the university.

If the university were to offer an in-service education program to help faculty in working effectively with students who have inadequate skills, about 51% of the respondents would be interested, and about 47% would not. For those who are interested, the preferred types of programs would be formal mini-courses, symposia, departmental curriculum development activities, or informal workshops.

It seems apparent that many faculty members are very much concerned about the levels of student competencies in basic skills, and a large proportion are interested in a variety of ways to bring about improvements.

This survey was undertaken by the following faculty members and graduate students at the University of Pittsburgh:

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The Languages of the Disciplines Project is sponsored by the University of Pittsburgh and the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education.

A description of the goals and objectives of the project may be found by consulting this booklet: Sartain, Harry W. Teaching - Learning: Languages of the Disciplines , 1981. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 207-059, 27p.)